

drumcorps

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i survived the academy and all i got was this stupid tshirt

self.drumcorps

Submitted an hour ago by grasperrydrip

I marched this past summer with the Academy and it was the worst experience of my marching career. I can safely say that this is the worst member culture that I had to be a part of. It truly felt that no one cared about if I was going to be there the next day or not, and that was probably because someone left about every other day for a month because of hating their experience there. My section alone lost 4 people during spring training due to being too miserable. We were hemorrhaging members to an uncanny degree where it was incredibly hard to have a stable membership at all, let alone build a caring culture when most of the people there wanted to leave.

This apathy could stem from a lot of core issues that they had: lack of vets, lack of food, lack of direction, and a lack of members. I think the major issue that defined my experience was a lack of staff. I was part of the front ensemble and we had some insane staff turnover throughout this season. Someone was fired a couple weeks prior to move-ins, our coordinator was fired two weeks in, and another staff member was fired midway through due to Safesport violations. We had one tech with us for pretty much all of tour, and he did a great job. However, the front staff was spread pretty thin from the beginning and the member turnover turned it into chaos. Nick Angelis noticed this and thought he would really like to help out with that. That is when my season went from kinda bad to absolutely awful.

Nick Angelis was a horrible staff member that haunted us every day, and you can see why on his rate my professor. He has many reports saying that he emotionally abuses his students, along with a few more colorful ratings of him and a few positive ones. In a quick Google search, you can find a couple articles that he was put on temporary leave from the Cincinnati Bearcat Bands because of abuse and humiliation of his students. I absolutely believe these reports because he treated us in the same demeaning fashion they describe. You either love him or hate him, but the stats are like 1/10 for loving him. I

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trust that he knows a lot about percussion and is a fantastic snare player, but he didn't know how to interact with students and was a horrible instructor for it. This man was apparently background checked.

Over the course of the season, he engaged in some fireable behavior. For example, it was really hot and everyone was trying their best to wear the least clothing possible, as you do. He stops one of the members, remarks about her sunburn, and asks for a picture of her, to which she requests that he doesn't photograph her and to leave her alone. He then shows her the picture he took of her and asks that she type in her mom's phone number so that he could send it to her, to which she declines and walks away. On another occasion near the time our coordinator was fired and one member in particular was having a hard time with that loss, he pulled them aside and told them that "your staff doesn't believe in you anymore", "your section doesn't want you", "I'm the only one who wants you here". He cornered another member of my section to have a similar conversation and made them feel uncomfortable, so we had to go in pairs to talk to him. We felt extremely uncomfortable around him and dreaded rehearsal because we had to see him there.

He was on staff as the staff coordinator, so I was under the impression that he was intended to just do behind the scenes staff mentoring and help them logistically, but he ran front ensemble blocks for the first week or so. We had a Memorial Day performance three days into move-ins, in which we had to put the show together musically in three days across the corps. This is already an overwhelming task, let alone the front still needing to learn the back half of the show. Nick led these critical rehearsals instead of our actual front staff and led rehearsal in the most narcissistic way possible. He would frequently cut off or talk over the front techs and steamroll rehearsals into whatever he wanted, despite there being a tight schedule of other plans in place. Burning us out from the start helped no one, and letting Nick lead us through that in the most inefficient and frustrating way possible was infuriating. Not only did he lead front rehearsals, but he also led percussion and full ensemble all the time in the exact same manner. It was clearly pissing off our staff, and when I asked them to say something on our behalf they said they couldn't criticize him or they would be fired. This guy, who was supposed to be there purely to serve the staff, from my understanding, was now basically a director and no one could touch him. No idea why he was given so much unassigned power in the first place, or why he was allowed to continue this for all of tour despite him not being able to interact with students safely.

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After he leaves during Cali tour and I hear he's returning soon, another member and I report our experiences with him to our med staff, who then directs me to have a conversation with the director. I was only there to report the photo and the conversations he had with the front members, nothing was said about my opinion of him. This conversation goes pretty poorly, with excuses for Nick being made like "he's got an awkward personality" and "he's had training for this recently so he should be good". I close this conversation with stating that he actively makes me hate being here and lots of others feel extremely uncomfortable when he's around. The med staff informed me they had meetings to discuss his status within the organization and it seems they are thinking about terminating him, but about 2 weeks later he comes back in. Multiple staff members apologized to me for his return, along with random hornline staff members apologizing to members of the front ensemble when he came back. It was obvious that every single person there knew just how bad he was, and yet did nothing. I'm told by the med staff that he was told not to speak to me and not to speak to the front ensemble, so now I feel like he definitely knows that I reported him. I was actively hurting a narcissist's reputation, and I felt like I had to watch my back for him to corner me and try something. The director was also gone for weeks after I heard through the med staff what was going on, so this boundary that was supposed to happen was never enforced and no one else was ever informed about it, so things went on as they had been after the reports. Dealing with this along with the frustration of stagnant scores and the front's own slew of interpersonal issues, I was losing my mind. I think I could've dealt with all the other bullshit, but letting this guy run the corps despite knowing he's unsafe made me resent this organization and everything I was doing for its production.

I got extremely depressed during this time because this environment was sucking all my empathy out and giving nothing back. I tried extremely hard to keep fighting to make this season feel worth it throughout all the turnover and the chaos of that ensemble, but it wore me down and my passion for the activity until it was down to nothing and one day, I just couldn't get up to go to block. Marching has been my one lasting passion because it really gave me a sense of purpose and I thought that the emotional and performance burnout would soon cause me to resent marching in its entirety and resent the purpose I thought I had. The apathy had gotten to me too, and I had to stop caring about how bad it was going to just make it through and let it be bad, which crushed my soul. After a couple blocks of laying in bed, a staff member spoke

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with me and said that Nick was really mad about me skipping rehearsal and specified that I was going to have to talk to him alone. Also that my attitude was really hurting my performance ability. There was someone else also skipping rehearsal due to being miserable and he mentioned nothing to them, so I really felt like Nick was about to corner me and try something with me.

The staff member said that I needed to speak to the medical staff before I talk to Nick, so when the staff asks me why I'm having issues, I report the long, updated list of offenses he committed for the third time. This is a new person on med staff who had maybe been there a week, and they took me seriously and submitted a report immediately to the Academy and to DCI. He said that he thought Nick was the director and that's why he had such a big-dog air about him, but as soon as he heard the reports from me, he immediately acted. Nick was not allowed to speak to me or the front for the rest of tour, and there is now a clear boundary set. The next day I had another meaningless conversation with the director to follow-up from our first meeting from almost two months ago. This goes almost as poorly as the first, with him saying that I should be more open to other approaches to teaching. I basically just tell him that this is a fucking joke and I came here to learn different approaches, that's the point. There were plenty of reasons to set a boundary and he failed to act because he straight up didn't care enough.

He acted the same way after we tweeted about the food situation. When he addressed the corps that day, he basically blamed us for the shortages by saying he went through the trash and could find enough food in there to fill up another tray, so we should just take less. What happened was that our freezers were broken so we couldn't keep any leftovers. In an effort to not throw away food, they tried to make the exact amount for the corps for each meal, which obviously didn't work and they shorted us many times. This hit the front especially hard during EPL when we would have to load and then eat last. Sometimes we showed up to eat and they had nothing. They just said sorry and nothing was done. But we're to blame for it, obviously. Funnily enough, a couple days after the season ends, the Academy posts that they're looking for a new director via Instagram. No wonder he didn't care, he absolutely just let the ship sink in front of him and was gonna hand off this failing organization to someone else because it got too hard.

This is a direct consequence of our director's apathy pervading the entire corps, and the corps general strategy of treating everyone like children. One more instance I have to mention was admin staff not allowing us to Doordash

orders because it made too much trash apparently? And despite us not getting fed, they would send Doordash cars away along with our food. Absolutely ridiculous. We told our staff about not getting food, to which they immediately went to admin to ask about. They just said there wasn't an issue, and nothing was done. I wasn't listened to because it felt like I was looked at as a whiny brat by the admin, and our concerns weren't ever taken seriously. I understand that the legality of things is tough with adults and minors present, so I understand there need to be rules in place for the lowest age possible to not expose minors to adult things. That doesn't mean to treat your members like they're all 15 and feel free to dismiss everything they say because the members are children and the staff members are adults. They fixed the food, but only after we tweeted about it and they were under public fire, so I suppose that's what it takes for the A-Team to figure out they have some issues to work on.

I hope that this post leads the Academy to take a look at themselves and to think through who they bring into their organization. As I said, you can find information about Nick Angelis' recent suspension and history of humiliating students in one Google search. They had to have found that in a background check, so what about that made them think he should be running this program? I had dinner with a few people I teach with to discuss my season, and after I gave them the recap they asked for the name of our staff coordinator. They all knew who Nick Angelis was and about his horrible reputation, and I became even more astounded that he was hired despite the entire marching world seeming to know he's horrible. It seemed like the team was assembled because they were available, not because they were quality or fit the message of the Academy. And to be frank, I still couldn't tell you what the Academy is about after marching there because they really had that little direction and culture as a group. I don't even think the director, a founder of the corps, could tell you anymore. This corps has been destroyed by apathy from the top down and I hope they take the time to reexamine their culture and pedagogy. At the least, I'm asking them to care about their members. At the most, I'm asking that they reexamine their culture and give members something to fight for besides scores and making it through the season.

Thank you to everyone that helped me through the season and thank you to the Academy for giving me a free shirt and material for my thesis. I will be using this experience well.

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I am sorry you had to go through that. They definitely doesn't sound fun at all. It's a shame to see how much the corps has changed since I marched. I really hope they are able to make the necessary changes to improve.

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